

Doing your part

Smog alerts and the OPS

What you can do to help combat smog

Smog is a combination of airborne pollutants that affect our health and our natural environment. Most harmful are ground-level ozone and fine airborne particles that can enter our lungs. These contaminants come from vehicles and other gasoline or diesel-powered machinery, factories, chemical sprays, oil-based paints, airborne dust and other sources.

Make it a top priority

The Ministry of the Environment takes the lead in the day-to-day job of protecting the environment. Among its initiatives, it has developed a special program to warn residents when unacceptably high levels of ground-level ozone are expected. When ministry forecasts indicate occurrences of ground-level ozone in excess of 80 parts per billion (ppb) over a wide geographic area, the ministry issues a smog alert.

In co-operation with Management Board's Green Workplace Program, the ministry is doing everything it can to reduce emissions that create smog from government buildings in the Greater Toronto Area. Whether at work or at home, the less energy we use, and the more energy efficient we are, the better it will be for the air we breathe.

On smog alert days there are very specific actions we can take.

Checklist for facilities managers on smog alert days

- reduce air conditioning in government buildings by three degrees Celsius

- reschedule lawn mowing, using pesticides and herbicides and leaf blowing
- make sure equipment is turned off whenever it's not in use
- restrict use of gasoline-powered equipment
- avoid using volatile organic compound (VOC) products such as paints, solvents or cleaners
- postpone refuelling government vehicles
- avoid open burning

Checklist for all members of the OPS

Here are just a few things you can do to improve the air we breathe and to protect yourself.

At work:

- consider teleconferencing, instead of travelling, to meetings
- take public transit, or better yet, walk or cycle to work
- if you use a car, don't travel alone. Try the government's car pool matching program: call 1-800-56-SHARE for information
- avoid traffic congestion
- work at home if it's feasible

At home:

- turn down the air conditioning
- avoid letting your car, or any other engine, idle for long periods
- restrict your use of gasoline-powered equipment
- leave mowing the lawn for another day
- don't use oil-based products such as paints, solvents or cleaners if you can avoid them. They contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which contribute to smog.

Smog is made up of airborne pollutants, the most harmful of which are ground-level ozone and fine airborne particles.

High levels of smog can cause coughing, wheezing and tightness of the chest.

Elderly people, children and people with heart and respiratory problems are particularly vulnerable.

All of us can take steps to protect ourselves on smog alert days and to improve the quality of the air we breathe.

- avoid strenuous exercise in the heat of the day
- stay indoors if you can – a cool, moist atmosphere is best
- don't use the barbecue

Finding solutions to our environmental problems takes a concerted and active effort by all of us. But with each of us taking personal responsibility and setting an example, we can make a difference.

For further information contact:

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